Google and the Koch Network: A Troubling Alliance of Convenience

Google Transparency Project

December 2019

CAMPAIGN FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

Introduction

Google's business model has faced mounting threats from both ends of the political spectrum in recent years, including calls for tough antitrust scrutiny, stricter liability for content, and the threat of a breakup. Through it all, the internet giant has been able to count on the support of one unlikely ally: the Koch network.

With little notice, billionaire industrialists Charles and David Koch and the conservative dark-money juggernaut they built have become some of Google's strongest backers, coming to the company's aid as it navigates the storm engulfing Big Tech in Washington and beyond. And Google, long a beacon of progressivism in corporate America, has embraced the Kochs and lent its support to many of their conservative causes.

With little notice, billionaire industrialists Charles and David Koch and the conservative dark-money juggernaut they built have become some of Google's strongest backers

The remarkable confluence of interests between two entities that long inhabited opposite ends of the political spectrum has funneled millions to a roster of conservative and libertarian policy groups, all working to protect Google and its profits from regulation. This little-noticed alliance of convenience has also seen Google lend its support to a long list of conservative groups that take positions antithetical to the vast majority of its outspoken, and mostly liberal, workforce, from climate change denial to opposition to gun control.

In all, Google has given money to at least 32 nonprofit policy groups and universities that are also funded by the Koch network since 2010, including at least 22 conservative and libertarian organizations, the GTP analysis shows. They include the American Conservative Union, American Legislative Exchange Council, Competitive Enterprise Institute, Heritage Foundation, and the Mercatus Center.

The emergence of these strange bedfellows has drawn occasional, puzzled notice from watchdogs and Beltway reporters.[1] But a Google Transparency Project review of tax records, financial disclosures, nonprofit reports and other public records shows that the relationship between Google and the Kochs stretches back further and is more extensive than has been previously known. It is also more important to Google than has been appreciated, giving the company a deep-pocketed conservative ally as it faces off against policymakers and regulators.

In August 2017, for example, top executives at the Charles Koch Institute and Engine, a Google-funded surrogate, wrote an opinion piece for *The Hill* arguing that legal immunity for internet

[1] https://www.ft.com/content/c816b3da-3077-11e9-8744-e7016697f225
https://www.prwatch.org/news/2013/11/12319/google-funding-grover-norquist-heritage-action-alec-and-more

platforms was essential to tech innovation.[2] The issue is one of Google's top policy priorities, with multibillion dollar implications for its bottom line.

The relationship between Google and the Kochs stretches back further and is more extensive than has been previously known

In May 2018, groups funded by the Charles Koch Foundation and Google joined forces to host a daylong Washington conference about "the vexing challenges that Internet platforms face in moderating content."[3] Speakers offered a sympathetic view of the predicaments the internet giants confront as they come under criticism for allowing hateful speech or illegal activities on their platforms.[4]

And in September 2019, Americans for Prosperity, the Koch family's political advocacy arm, released ads urging state attorneys general "not to politicize" antitrust probes of tech companies.[5] "The Charles Koch Institute and Foundation are a thoughtful partner and we are happy to work with them," Engine's Evan Engstrom said, as the groups joined forces to lobby on data privacy legislation.[6]

Engstrom, who has close ties to Google, is just one of a cast of characters who helped forge this unlikely alliance. A key, and little-noticed role also appears to have been played by a British public relations executive, whose surprising personal ties helped bridge the Google-Koch divide.

Rachel Whetstone was promoted to a top public policy job at Google in 2011, following stints working in the Conservative Party in the U.K.[7] Three decades earlier, her grandfather, Antony Fisher—described as "the Johnny Appleseed of the free-market movement"—founded what would become Atlas Network. The nonprofit, designed to encourage the proliferation of free-market think tanks, now supports nearly 500 groups around the world.[8]

Whetstone's personal and professional connections seem to have come together as Google sought to bolster its ties with conservatives in the wake of a disastrous 2011 Senate appearance by Google's former chief executive Eric Schmidt, who faced hostile grilling from Republicans.

---

[2] https://www.googletransparencyproject.org/articles/lobbyist-garage
https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/judicial/345195-defending-crucial-protections-for-internet-platforms
[3] https://comoatscale.com/; https://twitter.com/comoatscale
[4] https://comoatscale.com/agenda/
[5] https://americansforprosperity.org/afp-launches-ads-urging-state-ags-not-to-politicize-antitrust/
[6] https://www.ft.com/content/c816b3da-3077-11e9-8744-e7016697f225
[7] https://www.linkedin.com/in/rachel-whetstone-497890127/; https://www.prweek.com/article/1588194/6-rachel-whetstone-netflix
[8] https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/adamcurtis/entries/fdb484c8-99a1-32a3-83be-20108374b985
https://www.atlasnetwork.org/about/our-story
https://www.atlasnetwork.org/news/article/antony-fisher-entrepreneur-for-liberty

In 2012, the company made the first of what would become annual donations to Atlas Network, where Whetstone's mother serves as chairman of the board.[9]

This early move meant Google was suddenly funding many conservative and libertarian groups that were part of the Koch network, and it marked a remarkable shift from what had been Google's reliable support of progressive groups in the 2000s. At about the same time that Google entered the Atlas universe, the Kochs started to boost their involvement in the tech sector, both as investors and as activists. That task has largely fallen to Chase Koch**,** the 42-year-old son of Charles, who many Koch-watchers believe is being groomed to lead one of the world's most powerful private companies.

Under Chase Koch, the family empire boosted its involvement in the tech sector and started to send some of its millions to tech-focused policy groups, including several longtime allies of Google

Chase Koch may have initially seemed like an unlikely candidate to take over the family empire. Speaking to a group of Wichita Rotarians in 2019, the Koch scion admitted to several years of "screwing around in Austin," playing Led Zeppelin covers with his band and trying to find his way into Austin's tech startup scene before eventually joining Koch Industries.[10] Chase Koch was an executive vice president at Koch Agronomic Services, a plant nutrient and fertilizer subsidiary. In 2017, he jumped into the tech world, founding a venture capital division focused on high-growth technology companies called Koch Disruptive Technologies (KDT).[11]

The Koch network gained notoriety for underwriting a conservative revolution across America. But with its tech investments, the Kochs started to send some of their millions to tech-focused, centrist and even left-leaning groups that have been longtime allies of Google. By one estimate, the Kochs have quietly spent more than $10 million to defend the search giant and other tech companies from policy threats in Washington.[12]

For Google, there are clear benefits to collaborating with the Koch network. The Kochs' influence with conservatives has helped Google navigate a new Washington, one where the ties it forged with the Democratic establishment during the Obama years are less valuable than they had been.[13]

The Kochs' anti-regulation efforts have been particularly helpful. In addition to their ad campaign aimed at state attorneys general, and another targeting members of the Senate

[9] https://www.atlasnetwork.org/about/people/linda-whetstone

[10] https://www.seattletimes.com/business/chase-koch-bets-on-tech-to-turn-familys-industrial-giant-toward-the-future/
[11] https://news.kochind.com/news/2017/koch-disruptive-technologies-ready-to-transform?mod=article_inline, https://pitchbook.com/profiles/investor/232200-10
[12] https://www.cnbc.com/2019/06/30/koch-network-throws-its-weight-behind-silicon-valley.html
[13] https://theintercept.com/2016/04/22/googles-remarkably-close-relationship-with-the-obama-white-house-in-two-charts/

Judiciary Committee, Google also enlisted the Kochs' considerable firepower in the fight to protect Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which shields Google and other tech platforms from liability for user-generated content. This unsettled area of law is so important to Google that the company warns investors that changes to it "could adversely affect" its business.[14]

The Kochs' influence with conservatives has helped Google navigate a new Washington

Less clear is what the Kochs get out of their relationship with Google. The infusion of Google's millions has been welcomed by the Kochs' network of libertarian advocates and activists. The Kochs also have their own technology interests to protect. Beyond their recent investments in the sector, any regulation of Google and Facebook, for example, would also seemingly apply to i360, the Kochs' own political data mining company.[15]

The alliance with Google also bolsters the ongoing rebranding of the Kochs, whose name was considered poison in left-leaning Silicon Valley just a few years ago.[16] Chase Koch in particular has moved away from hard-line conservative politics, and tried to give the family's activism a softer edge.[17]

As the younger Koch recalled recently, he was "blown away by how much common ground" he found on one of his early visits to Silicon Valley. "We had almost the same core principles."[18]

Google Taps in to Atlas Network

Google cemented its reputation as a left-leaning company during the Obama years, with many of its executives going to work for the administration.[19] But that had become a liability among Republicans, who might normally be inclined to defend a big company against government regulation. After Schmidt was attacked by conservatives in Congress in 2011, Google moved swiftly to bolster its right flank.

[14] https://abc.xyz/investor/static/pdf/20180204_alphabet_10K.pdf?cache=11336e3
[15] https://theintercept.com/2019/09/09/koch-anti-immigrant-data-i360/
[16] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/daily-202/2019/04/03/daily-202-charles-koch-wants-a-more-open-border-immigration-is-one-reason-he-s-backed-away-from-the-gop/5ca38a9b1b326b0f7f38f2eb/
https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/justinesharrock/charles-koch-stumbles-in-silicon-valley
[17] https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/12/14/koch-brothers-chase-charles-next-generation-223099
[18] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dfWIRYwSYls&feature=youtu.be (@1:28)
[19] https://www.googletransparencyproject.org/articles/googles-revolving-door-us

Google's involvement with Atlas Network appears to have coincided with Rachel Whetstone's time at the company

In 2012, and with little notice, Google began making donations to Atlas Network, a move that gave the company entrée into a global web of right-wing economic groups. Google's involvement with the group appears to have begun with Rachel Whetstone's personal connection, and it laid the groundwork for what would become a deep involvement with an array of other conservative causes.

Whetstone joined Google in London in 2005 and was promoted to senior vice president of communications and public policy in May 2011.[20] A Conservative from the U.K., Whetstone's maternal grandfather, Antony Fisher, founded Atlas Network (then the Atlas Economic Research Foundation) in 1981.[21]

Today, the nonprofit channels money and other support to a constellation of more than 475 free-market groups in more than 90 countries.[22] Whetstone's mother, Linda, serves as chairman of the board.[23]

Shortly after Whetstone took on her new role, Google began making what would be annual donations to the group her grandfather founded. Google contributed between $25,000 and $99,999 to Atlas Network each year from 2012 to 2015.[24] In 2016 and 2017, as scrutiny of the company intensified, Google upped its support to six figures, between $100,000 and $1 million, earning a spot in Atlas Network's "Freedom Champions Circle."[25]

In 2018, Google was again giving less than $100,000 to Atlas Network.[26] But by then, it was also directly funding many conservative groups within the network.

Around 2013, for example, Google for the first time provided "substantial" funding to Americans for Tax Reform, the Federalist Society, the American Conservative Union, and Heritage Foundation's Heritage Action, according to company disclosures.[27] The same year, Google was also the single largest donor to the Competitive Enterprise Institute's annual dinner.[28]

---

[20] https://www.linkedin.com/in/rachel-whetstone-497890127/
[21] https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/adamcurtis/entries/fdb484c8-99a1-32a3-83be-20108374b985
https://www.atlasnetwork.org/about/our-story
[22] https://www.atlasnetwork.org/partners/global-directory; https://www.atlasnetwork.org/about/faq#does-atlas-network-distribute-grants-and-if-so-how
[23] https://www.atlasnetwork.org/about/people/linda-whetstone
[24] https://www.atlasnetwork.org/assets/uploads/annual-reports/Annual_Report_2012.pdf https://www.atlasnetwork.org/assets/uploads/annual-reports/Annual_Report_2013.pdf https://www.atlasnetwork.org/assets/uploads/annual-reports/Atlas_Network_YIR_2014.pdf
https://www.atlasnetwork.org/assets/uploads/annual-reports/Atlas_Network_Year_in_Review_2015_Digital_Final.pdf
https://www.atlasnetwork.org/donate/levels
[25] https://www.atlasnetwork.org/assets/uploads/annual-reports/Atlas_Network_Annual_Report_2016_Final_Digital_051517.pdf
https://www.atlasnetwork.org/assets/uploads/annual-reports/final_annual_report_for_web_2017.pdf
[26] https://www.atlasnetwork.org/assets/uploads/annual-reports/2018yearinreview.pdf
[27] https://www.prwatch.org/news/2013/11/12319/google-funding-grover-norquist-heritage-action-alec-and-more
[28] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2013/06/20/anatomy-of-a-washington-dinner-who-funds-the-competitive-enterprise-institute/

The CEI has long been a central hub driving climate change denial and was a key player in convincing the Trump administration to abandon the Paris climate accord.[29]

In late 2013, the Center for Media and Democracy reported that 10 new conservative groups received grants from Google that year.[30] All 10 groups also receive funding from the Koch brothers, according to the GTP analysis.[31] Today, Google's support for conservative groups is significant, with the company having supported at least 22 conservative and libertarian organizations that have also received the backing of the Koch Brothers.[32]

Google's support for Atlas Network also allows it to tap into like-minded groups around the world

These groups have consistently promoted Google's interests. For example, the American Enterprise Institute, funded by both Google and the Kochs, sponsored a trip for members of Congress to Sea Island, Georgia, in March 2016. The program included "A Conversation with Eric Schmidt," in which the Google executive shared his views on technology regulation and the tension between collective security and online privacy.[33]

Google's support for Atlas Network also allows it to tap into like-minded groups around the world, including Latin America and its fast-growing market. U.S. tech companies have sought to combat regulation in countries like Brazil, which is among the world's biggest users of Google.[34] And Brazil, along with Chile, are the countries in Latin America with the largest number of Atlas Network partner organizations.[35]

The Kochs Reach Out to Silicon Valley

The Kochs have had their sights set on Silicon Valley for several years, launching a new venture capital division and expanding their business and personal ties to Google and the broader technology sector. But fitting in hasn't been easy.

In 2013, employees at a search startup threatened to walk out when they learned that Lincoln Labs, a conservative tech policy group funded by the Kochs, was holding a "Liberty" hackathon

[29] https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/oct/11/google-contributions-climate-change-deniers
[30] https://www.prwatch.org/news/2013/11/12319/google-funding-grover-norquist-heritage-action-alec-and-more
[31] See Appendix
[32] See Appendix
[33] http://clerk.house.gov/GTImages/MT/2016/500015286.pdf
[34] https://www.blog.google/topics/next-billion-users/google-brazil-technology-serves-peoples-needs-wherever-they-may-be/
[35] https://www.atlasnetwork.org/partners/global-directory/latin-america-and-caribbean

in their offices. As *BuzzFeed* reported, "[In] the staunchly liberal Bay Area around San Francisco, the Koch name is poison."[36]

A year later, the Koch connections were still dogging Lincoln Labs. Its "tech-libertarian" Reboot conference was called a "cesspool" of homophobia, racism and the Kochs.[37]

Despite that unwelcoming environment, the Kochs have made steady inroads into the tech sector. Koch Industries has invested more than $17 billion since 2013 in technology companies working in cloud computing, medical devices, robotics and other areas, according to *Bloomberg*, with many of the investments led by Chase Koch.[38]

The Kochs have made steady inroads into the tech sector

Since launching Koch Disruptive Technologies in 2017, Chase Koch has co-invested with Google or a company executive in at least two new technology startups. In 2019, KDT led a $160 million funding round in Desktop Metal, a 3D printing startup.[39] In 2017, GV (formerly Google Ventures) led a $45 million round for the same company.[40]

With the Kochs' largesse, Chase Koch has gained entrée into Silicon Valley high society. He appeared with Google co-founder Sergey Brin at a 2018 blockchain summit at a posh hotel near Marrakesh

The Kochs and Google's Eric Schmidt have also coinvested in AOL founder Steve Case's $150 million Rise of the Rest seed fund, focused on supporting tech startups outside of Silicon Valley and New York. Other funders include Amazon head Jeff Bezos, Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz and members of the Pritzker and Walton families.[41] Google for Entrepreneurs founder Mary Grove is a partner in the fund.[42]

Chase Koch also reached out to Silicon Valley's elites in search of contributors to his father's new Stand Together donor network.[43] The network—previously run

[36] Lincoln Labs may have previously been known as Liberty Labs. https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/justinesharrock/charles-koch-stumbles-in-silicon-valley
[37] https://pando.com/2014/07/18/homophobia-racism-and-the-kochs-san-franciscos-tech-libertarian-reboot-conference-is-a-cesspool/
[38] https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2019-08-13/koch-s-massive-tech-bet-do-it-or-we-ll-end-up-in-the-dumpster
[39] https://www.desktopmetal.com/news/press-release-series-e/
[40] https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:4vfKodaVvBEJ:https://www.bizjournals.com/boston/news/2017/02/06/google-bmw-invest-45m-in-burlington-3d-printing.html+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=pa
[41] https://www.bizjournals.com/washington/news/2017/12/05/steve-cases-new-rise-of-the-rest-fund-raises-150m.html
[42] https://www.bizjournals.com/washington/news/2018/02/09/steve-cases-revolution-hires-google-exec-for-rise.html https://www.linkedin.com/in/marygrove/
[43] https://www.barrons.com/articles/chase-koch-on-applying-market-based-management-to-social-justice-initiatives-51562858370

through Freedom Partners, which has been described as the "Koch Brothers' secret bank" to influence politics and policy—had an early focus on educational quality and alleviating poverty when it was first unveiled in 2016.[44]

Stand Together reported more than $21 million in grants and contributions the following year. The group does not disclose the identities of its contributors on its annual IRS returns, making it impossible to determine how much it has received from tech executives.[45] Interestingly, Stand Together has added technology policy to its portfolio, with "Tech and Innovation" awkwardly shoehorned among its list of priorities, along with social issues such as education, poverty, criminal justice and business for good—all areas that the Kochs' new allies on the left might easily support.[46]

The Kochs' largesse has given Chase Koch an entrée into Silicon Valley high society. In July 2018, he appeared with Google co-founder Sergey Brin on a panel to discuss the virtues of blockchain at a summit at Richard Branson's swank Kasbah Tamadot hotel near Marrakesh, Morocco.[47]

The Kochs' largesse has given Chase Koch an entrée into Silicon Valley high society

Four months later, Chase was the featured guest at Startup Grind, an initiative sponsored by Google for Entrepreneurs (now Google for Startups) that claims to help entrepreneurs connect with strategic partners and secure funding.[48] In 2019, the Google-sponsored initiative also hosted Koch Industries' Steve Feilmeier and KDT's Managing Director Jason Ilian.[49]

Chase's father, Charles Koch, has also played a key role in the family's pivot to technology. In February 2017, he made clear just how important the tech sector was to his empire, imploring the top brass of Koch Industries to embrace technology and prepare for a data driven, knowledge-based future. "Do it or we'll end up in the dumpster."[50]

---

[44] https://www.politico.com/story/2013/09/behind-the-curtain-exclusive-the-koch-brothers-secret-bank-096669
https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2016/01/29/koch-brothers-push-poverty-education-societal-change--initiative-republican/79468744/
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/daily-202/2019/05/20/daily-202-the-koch-network-is-reorganizing-under-a-new-name-and-with-new-priorities/5ce1a94fa7a0a435cff8c0d3/
[45] http://990.erieri.com/EINS/273197768/273197768_2017_10277749.PDF
[46] http://standtogether.org/who-we-are
[47] https://medium.com/meetbitfury/emerging-technologies-and-trends-reflections-from-the-2018-blockchain-summit-in-morocco-64e742447122
https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaeldelcastillo/2018/07/09/moving-to-marrakesh-why-richard-branson-took-the-blockchain-summit-to-africa/#1ad0d4d87cec
[48] https://www.startupgrind.com/events/details/startup-grind-wichita-presents-chase-koch-president-koch-disruptive-technologies/
[49] https://www.startupgrind.com/events/details/startup-grind-wichita-presents-steve-feilmeier-evp-cfo-koch-industries-sponsored-by-bkd-ima-wsu-foundation/
https://www.startupgrind.com/events/details/startup-grind-wichita-presents-jason-illian-managing-director-koch-disruptive-technologies-presented-by-6-meridian/
[50] https://news.kochind.com/news/2017/discovery-newsletter-the-transformation-imperativ

Charles Koch, who pushed top executives at Koch Industries to embrace technology, attended Base Camp, a secretive gathering for tech elites, in May 2018

And in May 2018, Charles Koch appeared as an unlikely guest at "Base Camp," a secretive gathering of tech elites hosted by Sequoia Capital, the legendary Silicon Valley venture capital firm that counts Google as one of its most successful investments.[51]

Partnering to Influence Tech Policy

As the Kochs deepened their ties to Silicon Valley, they also forged a closer alliance with Google, giving the company a powerful conservative ally at a time when the tech industry is facing serious policy threats on multiple fronts.[52]

Much of that advocacy has come through Engine, a San Francisco-based nonprofit that was created by Google public policy employees and is effectively a branch of the company's lobbying operation.[53] In several instances, the Kochs and Engine have combined to push their shared agendas. The Charles Koch Foundation also appears to have become a direct financial supporter of Engine in 2017, contributing $12,500 to the Engine Research Foundation, according to Koch tax filings.[54]

In all, the Koch network has quietly spent at least $10 million since 2015 defending Silicon Valley companies like Google and Facebook from the growing policy challenges they face in Washington, according to a *CNBC* report in July 2019.[55]

In May 2016, for instance, the Charles Koch Institute hosted a seminar on the "Future of Innovation" a few blocks from the Capitol.[56] All four panelists at the libertarian-themed seminar have financial ties Google, and two of them received support from the Kochs, as well:

---

[51] https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-09-05/kochs-downplay-politics-to-find-common-ground-in-liberal-silicon-valley https://www.sequoiacap.com/companies/google/; https://twitter.com/mvernal/status/998422937383272450?lang=en
[52] https://www.politico.com/news/2019/10/06/koch-brothers-tech-industry-031204
[53] https://www.googletransparencyproject.org/articles/lobbyist-garage https://theintercept.com/2018/05/30/google-engine-advocacy-tech-startups/
[54] https://mk0bahufale3skgkthdo.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/CKF_2017_990.pdf
[55] https://www.cnbc.com/2019/06/30/koch-network-throws-its-weight-behind-silicon-valley.html
[56] https://www.charleskochinstitute.org/event/the-future-of-innovation/

- Maura Corbett, founder and CEO of the Glen Echo Group, which lists Google among its clients. She has also managed and worked with several policy and lobbying coalitions that Google participated in, including the NetCoalition, Wireless Innovation Alliance and Engine Advocacy.[57]

- Berin Szoka, president and founder of the libertarian advocacy group TechFreedom, which has received funding from both Google and the Kochs.[58]

- Michael Petricone, senior vice president of government affairs at the Consumer Technology Association, which counts Google as a member.[59]

- Adam Thierer, a senior research fellow at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, which receives funding from Google and the Kochs.[60]

The Koch network and Google's surrogates and other allies partnered several times in 2017, joining forces and mobilizing allies on pressing tech policy issues. In the summer and early fall, as Google was facing legislative threats from abroad that would have forced it to give law enforcement access to encrypted messages sent by suspected extremists and criminals, Engine and the Kochs co-hosted two briefings for congressional staff on the finer points of encryption.[61]

The Hill briefings were stacked with Google-funded speakers including Amie Stepanovich with Access Now ($2.3 million in Google funding since 2011);[62] Ed Felten, a Princeton professor and former technologist with the Federal Trade Commission (recipient of a 2010 Google Focused Research Award for privacy);[63] and Nick Feamster, another Princeton professor who has received $1.6 million in Google research funding.[64]

Engine and the Kochs teamed again in August 2017, when Engstrom, the group's executive director, wrote an opinion piece for *The Hill* with Jesse Blumenthal, then head of technology policy at the Charles Koch Institute.[65] The two argued in defense of Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, warning *The Hill*'s inside-the Beltway readers that without its protections, digital innovation and freedom of expression would suffer. "If we make large tech firms our country's policemen we will chill the greatest tool humanity has ever created for free speech," they wrote.

---

[57] https://web.archive.org/web/20150615021721/http://www.glenechogroup.com/work
[58] https://www.linkedin.com/in/berinszoka/
https://services.google.com/fh/files/misc/trade_association_and_third_party_groups.pdf
https://mk0bahufale3skgkthdo.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/CKF_2017_990.pdf
[59] https://www.linkedin.com/in/michael-petricone-8529153/
https://services.google.com/fh/files/misc/trade_association_and_third_party_groups.pdf
[60] https://www.mercatus.org/scholars/adam-thierer
https://www.vox.com/2014/5/11/5707482/how-google-money-is-helping-turn-the-political-right-against-strong
[61] https://www.eventbrite.com/e/nuts-and-bolts-deciphering-the-details-of-encryption-tickets-35359888378
https://www.charleskochinstitute.org/event/nuts-bolts-introduction-encryption/ https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/jul/14/new-law-would-force-facebook-and-google-to-give-police-access-to-encrypted-messages
[62] https://www.accessnow.org/financials/
[63] https://ai.googleblog.com/2010/02/announcing-google-focused-research.html
[64] https://web.archive.org/web/20160416050836/https://www.cs.princeton.edu/~feamster/cv/cv-jan2016.pdf
[65] https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/judicial/345195-defending-crucial-protections-for-internet-platforms

Blumenthal has his own ties to Google. Prior to joining the Kochs, he worked for Engage LLC, a Washington public affairs firm that counts Google's policy team as one of its largest clients.[66]

Several organizations that have hosted Google fellows in recent years have also received funding from the Kochs

Google and the Kochs were entwined in other ways, too. The same month the *Hill* op-ed appeared, more than a dozen groups signed on to a letter to the Senate leadership opposing the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA), which was aimed at holding tech platforms accountable for knowingly hosting content that facilitates sex trafficking.[67] Among the groups opposing the measure were four that received funding from both the Kochs and Google: Heritage Action, New America Open Technology Institute, R Street Institute, and TechFreedom.[68]

Google's Policy Fellowship program, which places undergraduate, graduate and law students in policy groups for a summer, also overlapped with Koch-funded groups.[69] Several organizations that have hosted Google fellows in recent years have also received funding from the Kochs, including the CATO Institute, Center for Democracy and Technology, Engine, New America's Open Technology Institute, and TechFreedom.[70]

Mobilizing Against New Threats

By 2018, Google and Silicon Valley were facing growing public anger over tech platforms' treatment of online speech far beyond the liability issues raised during their unsuccessful fight against SESTA. And the Koch network again stepped in on Google's side.

On the left, progressive activists were increasingly outraged over tech platforms' unwillingness to address what they saw as a rising flood of online hate—including racist, sexist and misogynist content—as well as big tech's refusal to deal with online disinformation and fake news.[71] On the right, conservative activists were equally infuriated over what they saw as tech companies' increasing suppression, and sometimes outright censorship, of online conservative speech.[72]

[66] https://www.linkedin.com/in/jesseblumenthal/
https://enga.ge/all-abuzz-about-buzz/
https://enga.ge/projects/
[67] https://www.googletransparencyproject.org/articles/google-funds-dozens-groups-fighting-sex-trafficking-bill
[68] http://www.rstreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/S1693Letter.pdf,
https://services.google.com/fh/files/misc/trade_association_and_third_party_groups.pdf
https://mk0bahufale3skgkthdo.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/CKF_2017_990.pdf
[69] https://www.google.com/policyfellowship/
[70] https://www.google.com/policyfellowship/hosts/
[71] https://www.cfr.org/blog/year-review-tech-companies-grapple-disinformation
[72] https://cdn.mrc.org/static/censored/censored-howonlinemediacompaniesaresuppressingconservativespeech-digitalcopy.pdf

In May, several Koch- and Google-funded organizations launched a new initiative called Content Moderation and Removal at Scale, or "COMO at Scale," with a summit held just steps from the White House.[73] The organizing committee for the initiative was comprised almost entirely of policy groups funded by the Charles Koch Foundation or Google, and four members of the committee were funded by both: Cato Institute, Center for Democracy & Technology, Engine and the New America Open Technology Institute.[74]

In September 2018, the Google-Koch network mobilized again, this time writing a joint letter to Attorney General Jeff Sessions expressing grave concerns over Department of Justice plans to convene a meeting of state attorneys general to look into whether search engines and social media were hurting competition and stifling speech.[75] The letter was signed by four groups funded by Google and the Kochs: TechFreedom, Engine, the Competitive Enterprise Institute and the Lincoln Network (formerly Lincoln Labs).[76]

The odd alliance between Google and the Kochs veered into other terrain as well. In May 2018, the two came together to push for changes to the bail code in the United States.[77] Five months later, Koch Industries' general counsel Mark Holden joined Google at its annual Zeitgeist conference to push more broadly for criminal justice reform, further evidence of the Kochs' ongoing efforts to soften their image.[78]

Meanwhile, the Kochs and Engine have continued to expand their partnership, co-hosting at least seven "Nuts and Bolts" briefings on Capitol Hill between mid-May and early October 2019.[79] At each briefing, activists and policy groups funded by Google and the Kochs have dominated the discussion. The lineup has included many familiar topics, such as content moderation and Section 230/intermediary liability and the EU's General Data Protection Regulation. And the briefings have mirrored Google's key policy fights.

For example, the Koch-Engine partnership hosted three Hill briefings in the fall on the benefits of encryption.[80] In late September 2019, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that congressional antitrust investigators were scrutinizing plans by Google to implement a new end-to-end encryption protocol that critics say will give the company a competitive advantage by making it harder for others to access consumer data.[81] Child protection groups have warned the move could

---

[73] https://law.scu.edu/event/content-moderation-removal-at-scale/
https://comoatscale.com/
[74] https://comoatscale.com/about/
[75] https://cei.org/sites/default/files/Letter_-to-Jeff-Sessions-re-Social-Media-Bias-v2.pdf
[76] https://joinlincoln.org/events/2016/encryption-housing-fireside-chat
[77] https://www.cnbc.com/2018/05/07/google-and-koch-brothers-team-up-for-bail-reform.html
[78] https://news.kochind.com/news/2018/how-criminal-justice-reform-unites-koch-with-alice
[79] https://www.eventbrite.com/e/nuts-and-bolts-the-buzzwords-of-data-privacy-tickets-60600398423#;
https://www.eventbrite.com/e/nuts-and-bolts-gdpr-one-year-out-tickets-61604001226#; https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-nuts-and-bolts-of-content-moderation-platforms-behind-the-scenes-tickets-62926671368#; https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-nuts-and-bolts-of-content-moderation-how-the-internet-works-tickets-64624909845?aff=ebdssbdestsearch#; https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-nuts-and-bolts-of-encryption-encryption-101-tickets-72280690491#; https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-nuts-and-bolts-of-encryption-global-threats-to-encryption-tickets-73869586923#;
https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-nuts-and-bolts-of-encryption-deal-or-no-deal-tickets-75727921251?aff=ebapi#
[80] https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-nuts-and-bolts-of-encryption-encryption-101-tickets-72280690491#;
https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-nuts-and-bolts-of-encryption-global-threats-to-encryption-tickets-73869586923#;
https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-nuts-and-bolts-of-encryption-deal-or-no-deal-tickets-75727921251?aff=ebapi#
[81] https://www.wsj.com/articles/google-draws-house-antitrust-scrutiny-of-internet-protocol-11569765637

jeopardize efforts to prevent and prosecute crimes against children, such as the sharing of images of child sexual abuse.[82]

Pushing Back Against Antitrust Scrutiny

The Kochs launched an ad campaign to defend tech companies against intensifying antitrust scrutiny

The Kochs took their most public stance on Google's behalf when they launched ad campaigns to defend the tech giants against mounting antitrust scrutiny.[83]

In March 2019, the Koch-funded Americans for Prosperity launched an ad campaign directed at members of the Senate Judiciary Committee opposing what it said was politicized enforcement against American tech companies.[84] The push followed a pledge by Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) in early March to break up Google, Amazon and Facebook if she is elected president in 2020.[85]

The ads, slated to run in each senator's state and in Washington, D.C., over a two-week period, directed users to a web page where they could send an email to committee members urging them to oppose "politicizing antitrust enforcement."[86]

In September, AFP launched a second ad campaign, this time in response to news that attorneys general for 48 states as well as Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico were launching antitrust probes of Google.[87] The ads, which showed what appeared to be silhouetted attorneys general conspiratorially cutting a political deal, said, "Don't Let Government Abuse Antitrust Authority!" and pointed to a page urging users to write their attorney general.[88]

A month later, in October 2019, Jesse Blumenthal, now the head of tech policy for the Kochs' Stand Together, told *Politico,* "It's been troubling to see a sort of coming together of populist mobs on the left and the right. …Our views haven't changed based on the politics of the moment." [89]

---

[82] https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/20-child-safety-groups-call-on-congress-stop-google-before-it-jeopardizes-online-child-safety/
[83] https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7454643/Koch-family-taking-ads-Facebook-defend-Silicon-Valley-giants.html
[84] https://americansforprosperity.org/new-afp-ad-campaign-urges-bipartisan-group-of-senators-not-to-politicize-antitrust-enforcement/
[85] https://www.theverge.com/2019/3/8/18256032/elizabeth-warren-antitrust-google-amazon-facebook-break-up
[86] https://americansforprosperity.ivolunteers.com/ContactOfficials/Government-Shouldn-t-Pick-Winners-and-Losers-on-the-Internet-2
[87] https://americansforprosperity.org/afp-launches-ads-urging-state-ags-not-to-politicize-antitrust/
https://www.cbsnews.com/news/google-antitrust-probe-48-u-s-states-launch-antitrust-investigation-of-google-dominance-in-search-ads-and-data/
[88] https://mk0xituxemauaaa56cm7.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/AFP_FBAD_19C_2128_AntiTrust_V01.png
https://americansforprosperity.ivolunteers.com/ContactOfficials/Tell-Your-Attorney-General-Don-t-Let-Government-Abuse-Antitrust-Authority-TX
[89] https://www.politico.com/news/2019/10/06/koch-brothers-tech-industry-031204

Appendix

Policy groups funded by Kochs *and* Google[90]
Groups in **bold** are conservative/libertarian

1. **American Conservative Union**[91]
2. **American Enterprise Institute**
3. **American Legislative Exchange Council** [92]
4. **Americans for Tax Reform**
5. Arizona State University Foundation
6. Aspen Institute[93]
7. **Atlas Network**[94]
8. Brookings Institution
9. **CATO Institute** (Co-founded by Charles Koch)[95]
10. Center for Democracy and Technology
11. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)
12. **Competitive Enterprise Institute**
13. Engine Advocacy (aka Engine Research Foundation)
14. **Federalist Society**
15. **George Mason University Foundation**
16. **George Mason University Law and Economics Center**[96]
17. Georgia Tech Foundation
18. **Heritage Foundation (Heritage Action)**[97]
19. **Independent Women's Forum**[98]
20. **International Center for Law & Economics**[99]
21. **Lincoln Network**
22. **Mercatus Center**[100]
23. **National Review Institute**
24. **National Taxpayers Union**
25. National Urban League[101]
26. New America Foundation
27. **R St. Institute**
28. **Students for Liberty**[102]

---

[90] Unless otherwise noted, all groups can be found in the Charles Koch Foundation's 2017 990 (https://mk0bahufale3skgkthdo.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/CKF_2017_990.pdf) and Google's third party funding disclosure (https://services.google.com/fh/files/misc/trade_association_and_third_party_groups.pdf; https://web.archive.org/web/20101118084843/http:/www.google.com/publicpolicy/transparency.html)
[91] https://mk0bahufale3skgkthdo.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2016-CKF-990.pdf
[92] https://influencemap.org/site/data/000/181/Google_31-08-2016_Transparency_%E2%80%93_U.S._Public_Policy_%E2%80%93_Google.pdf
[93] https://mk0bahufale3skgkthdo.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/990-CKF-2018.pdf
[94] https://www.atlasnetwork.org/assets/uploads/annual-reports/2018yearinreview.pdf
[95] https://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/25/cato-institute-and-koch-brothers-reach-agreement/
[96] https://masonlec.org/donors/
[97] https://www.politico.com/story/2013/10/koch-brothers-heritage-action-donation-098054
[98] https://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Independent_Women's_Forum
[99] https://mk0bahufale3skgkthdo.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/990-CKF-2018.pdf
[100] https://mk0bahufale3skgkthdo.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/990-CKF-2018.pdf
[101] https://s3.amazonaws.com/2ndvote-webfiles/NUL%202016%20Sponsors.png
[102] https://pando.com/2015/02/20/strange-bedfellows/

29. **TechFreedom**
30. Technology Policy Institute
31. **Texas Public Policy Foundation**[103]
32. **Washington Legal Foundation**

[103] https://www.prwatch.org/news/2013/11/12319/google-funding-grover-norquist-heritage-action-alec-and-more; https://web.archive.org/web/20121012071048/http:/www.google.com/publicpolicy/transparency.html; https://web.archive.org/web/20130529013851/http:/www.google.com/publicpolicy/transparency.html; https://web.archive.org/web/20140331040310/http:/www.google.com/publicpolicy/transparency.html